

THE CLEVELAND
MUSEUM OF ART
11150 EAST
BOULEVARD
CLEVELAND, OHIO
44106-1797



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contact: Greg Donley

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART PRESENTS AN EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTING
FIVE CENTURIES OF GERMAN DRAWINGS FROM ITS PERMANENT COLLECTION

Artists ranging from such Renaissance masters as Albrecht Dürer and his contemporaries Wolf Huber and Albrecht Altdorfer to early-20th-century artists Gustav Klimt, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, and George Grosz are featured in *The German Tradition*, an exhibition of drawings from April 27 to June 27, 1993, at The Cleveland Museum of Art. Assembled entirely from the Museum's permanent collection, the exhibition includes about 65 drawings and watercolors by German-speaking artists from the modern regions of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.

Two threads, one cultural, one aesthetic, run through the exhibition, uniting the works as essentially German. German-speaking artists, though they traveled widely and studied the work of other artists throughout Europe, continually displayed a self-conscious sense of themselves as German artists. These artists drew inspiration from the great German artists of the past, and acknowledged other European traditions without surrendering their distinctive German identity. Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) holds the place of honor as the father of German art, and for five centuries artists have made pilgrimages to Dürer's grave, studied his works, and looked to the treatises he wrote to instruct young German artists. The second thread linking these artists and their works is an emphasis on the quality of craftsmanship. The exhibition reveals that artists' fascination with the pure expressive power of the line spanned the centuries, Beginning with Dürer, and that drawing played a major part in the development of German art. In 1944, George Grosz described this power: "Line...is an invention – a product of the brain and soul of man. It is perfectly logical and natural, then, that to the lines that we find in nature we should add other lines that are the product of our inner vision. Such drawing can present both the outer husk and the inner essence."

Dürer's *The Ascension of Christ*, made in pen and brown ink in about 1510, offers a useful starting point. The composition is carefully balanced, with fine detail in the four corners (trees and a low horizon below, angels and clouds above) framing a clearly defined space through the center of

which rises the figure of Christ. The sense of three-dimensionality is achieved through the skillful use of carefully controlled lines. Expressionist Grosz's *Man Seated with a Hat On*, executed over 400 years later, shows a similar faith in the simple, purposeful line. As the earliest advocate of German Realism, and often regarded as the greatest German draftsman since Dürer Adolf Menzel skillfully uses graphite to solve such artistic problems as the challenging angle of the sitter's head in an 1886 drawing, *Head of a Woman*. Lovis Corinth stylistically links 19th-century Realism and Impressionism to 20th-century Expressionism; his brooding *Self-Portrait* of 1923 shows a linear economy similar to Grosz's and a Menzel-like virtuoso command of his medium, in this case, conté crayon,

While religious themes and portraiture account for a large portion of the works in the show, another significant group of drawings falls into the category of landscape. In these, as in the other works discussed, precision and linearity are defining stylistic elements. Wolf Huber, one of the earliest members of the "Danube School" and a contemporary of Dürer, is represented by *View of a Castle*, a carefully-observed rendition of a German setting which reveals the wakening interest in landscape as a genre unto itself during the first part of the 16th century. *Grindelwald Glacier*, an early 19th-century study for a painting by Joseph Koch, relies entirely on the contour line, with no shading or color to aid in the composition—a representative example of the Neoclassical style of which Koch was a major proponent. German Romanticism, a contemporary cross-current to Neoclassicism, is exemplified by Carl Rottman's expressive watercolor with pen and ink of a classical Greek site, *Epidauros*, from 1843, and by an Italian landscape, *Waterfall at Terni*, ca. 1793, precisely drawn in ink and washes by Jakob Phillip Hackert. Almost jarring in comparison, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Mountain Landscape* of around 1918 uses bold marks and a simplified composition to achieve immediacy and power. His heavy black lines recall those of a woodcut, a medium which made its revival with Kirchner and his fellow German Expressionists.

Because of the importance German artists have staunchly placed upon drawing as the basis for exploring their ideas and refining their technique, the study of German drawing reveals the elemental forces behind the development of German art. *The German Tradition* offers a five-century-long tradition of consummate draftsmanship, which, though styles and ideas change with the times, always looks back to the solid aesthetic values established by Dürer and his contemporaries. The exhibition was conceived by Michael Miller and organized by Jeannine O'Grody, a CMA/CWRU Joint Program in Art History Fellow, and Sabine Kretzschmar of the prints and drawings department.